

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 1931

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PINS, KS
SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST IN POSSIBLE TRIAL OF AUTHOR
AND PUBLISHERS

REF: STATE 58687

1. PROFESSOR YI YONG-HUI (LEE YONG-HUI) AND PUBLISHER
PAEK NAK-CHONG ARE BEING TRIED FOR VIOLATION OF THE
ANTI-COMMUNIST LAW. TRIAL OPENED ON JANUARY 27 AT
SEOUL DISTRICT COURT AND IS EXPECTED TO END IN ABOUT
TWO OR THREE WEEKS.

2. PROFESSOR YI IS AUTHOR OF MANY BOOKS AND ARTICLES
INCLUDING, "THE LOGIC OF AN AGE OF TRANSITION", "IDOLATRY
AND REASON", AND "DIALOGUE WITH 800 MILLION". HE HAS
STANDING AS A SCHOLAR ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY OTHER
PROFESSORS WITH GREATER PROFESSIONAL STANDING IN HIS
FIELDS. HIS SPECIAL GIFT IS HIS ABILITY TO POPULARIZE
HIS IDEAS IN THE SENSE THAT HE WRITES WELL AND IS A
STIMULATING SPEAKER WHO MAINTAINED A HEAVY SCHEDULE OF
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENTS. HE REPORTEDLY HAD A CONSIDERABLE
FOLLOWING AMONG STUDENTS.

3. PROFESSOR YI ALSO MAINTAINED CONTACTS WITH
DISSIDENTS AND SOME OF HIS WRITING TENDED TO BE CRITICAL
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OF THE ROKG. DISSIDENTS MAINTAIN THAT HIS PROSECUTION
UNDER THE ANTI-COMMUNIST LAW IS DESIGNED TO PUNISH HIM
FOR HIS CRITICISM AND TO WARN OTHER DISSIDENTS TO WATCH
THEIR STEP.

4. THE EMBASSY HAS COVERED SOME SESSIONS OF TRIAL.
THE PROSECUTION IS TRYING TO SHOW THAT PROFESSOR YI'S

WRITINGS -- ESPECIALLY IN "DIALOGUE WITH 800 MILLION" -- PRAISE COMMUNISM. COURT SESSIONS RESEMBLY A THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS ON WHETHER A TEXT IS HERETICAL. FOR EXAMPLE, MUCH EFFORT WAS DEVOTED TO DISCUSSION OF WHETHER PROFESSOR YI'S HANDLING OF THE THEME THAT MAO UNITED CHINA ASCRIBED MAO'S SUCESS TO THE SUPERIORITY OF HIS DOCTRINE OR OTHER FACTORS.

5. EMBOFFS HAVE DISCUSSED CASE WITH SOME KOREAN PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE NOT RELATED TO REGIME OR DISSIDENTS. THEY DO NOT CONSIDER YI A COMMUNIST (OF COURSE, TRIAL CENTERS ON WHETHER HE PRAISED COMMUNISM NOT WHETHER HE IS A COMMUNIST). HOWEVER, THEY DO NOTE THAT HIS POLITICAL VIEWS ARE SEVERAL STEPS AHEAD OF THE AVERAGE WELL EDUCATED KOREAN. THEY ALSO EXPRESSED MILD CONCERN THAT SOME OF HIS VIEWS ON CHINESE COMMUNISM COULD BE INTERPRETED AS DEPICTING THAT MOVEMENT AS AN EFFECTIVE EXPRESSION OF CHINESE NATIONALISM, A THEME THAT COULD PLANT UNFORTUNATE SEEDS AMONG THE MANY IMPRESSIONABLE STUDENTS YI INFLUENCED.

6. AT SAME TRIAL PAEK NAK-CHONG FACES LESS SERIOUS CHARGE OF PUBLISHING YI'S MATERIAL. HE ATTENDS COURT AS CO-DEFENDENT BUT IS NOT UNDER DETENTION. YI'S LAWYERS SAY THEY DO NOT BELIEVE PAK KWAN-SUN WILL BE CHARGED ALTHOUGH HE TOO WAS INVESTIGATED IN CONNECTION
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WITH THIS CASE.

7. COMMENT: KOREAN SOCIETY IS STILL QUITE CONSERVATIVE. A STATUTE SUCH AS THE ANTI-COMMUNIST LAW WHICH IS DESIGNED TO PROTECT THEIR SOCIETY FROM COMMUNISM -- EVEN TO THE EXTENT OF BANNING PRAISE OF COMMUNISM -- IS CONSIDERED REASONABLE BY MANY. PROFESSOR YI'S STYLE OF STAYING IN THE VANGUARD OF POLITICAL THINKING HAS GOTTEN HIM CAUGHT IN THE TOILS OF THE LAW, BUT WE CANNOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT HIS CRITICISM OF THE ROKG PLAYED A PART IN THE REGIME'S DECISION TO PROSECUTE THE CHARGE. WE WILL FOLLOW CASE AS IT DEVELOPS.
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